

A  
DISCOURSE  
O F  
Things  
A B O V E  
R E A S O N.

I N Q U I R I N G

*Whether a Philosopher should admit there are any such.*

*By a Fellow of the Royal Society. R. Boyle.*

To which are annexed by the Publisher  
( for the Affinity of the Subjects )

Some

A D V I C E S

About judging of Things said to  
Transcend R E A S O N.

W R I T T E N

*By a Fellow of the same Society.*

L O N D O N, Printed by E. T. and R. H.  
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## An Advertisement.

**T**He Later of the two following Dialogues is but a part of a Discourse, consisting of some Conferences, whereof, that was neither the First, nor the Last. This 'twas thought fit the Reader should have notice of, that he may the more easily guess upon what account it is, that some Clauses in the first Page, (and perhaps a few other Passages elsewhere) contain somewhat that appears not altogether the same it would have done, if there had been no need to make any alteration at all in that Page. But because, tho there was a connection between that Dialogue and the rest of the Papers from which 'tis dismembered, yet it's dependency upon the others, is not so very great, but that the Publisher thought the divulging of it might be useful and seasonable: and therefore finding that want of Leisure,

and much Diffidence, made the Author unwilling to revise, and part with the other Papers that accompanied this which now comes forth; he prevail'd with him to suffer that Dialogue to take its Fortune, which the Publisher hopes may be such, as may incourage the Author to communicate what he has further meditated upon such Subjects.

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## E R R A T A.

Pag 3. lin. 3. read *Arnobius*. p. 9. l. 5. r. how. p. 25 l. 23.  
 r. *continui*. p. ib. l. 21 r. *hac usque superata*. p. 38. l. 20.  
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 evidence of.

A

A  
DISCOURSE  
OF  
Things  
ABOVE  
REASON.

ENQUIRING,  
Whether a Philosopher should  
admit there are any such.

The Speakers are, *Sophronius*, *Eugenius*, *Pyrocles*, and *Timotheus*.

*Euge.* **T**HE Seriousness you  
yet retain in your  
looks, and the po-  
sture we found you  
in at our entrance, makes me fear  
these two Gentlemen and I are un-  
B feasonable

seasonable intruders, that are so unhappy as to disturb your Meditations.

*Sophron.* Instead of doing that, you will much promote them, if you please to accompany me in them : For the subject that busied my thoughts is both so abstruse and so important, that it needs more than one to consider it, and deserves that He should be a far better considerer than I, who therefore must think my self far less fit for that task than you.

*Eng.* I will punish the flattery of these last words, by declining to make any Return to it.

*Pyrocl.* And I, Gentlemen, to prevent the loss of time and words between you, shall without farther Ceremony ask *Sophronius*, what his thoughts were employed about when we came in.

*Sophr.* I was then musing upon a Subject,

Subject, that was newly proposed to me by our common Friend *Arnobius*, who would needs have my opinion, *Whether*, and if at all, *how far*, we may employ our reasonings about things that are above our Reason, as Christians grant some mysteries of their Religion to be.

*Euge.* If, by *things above Reason*, be meant only those, that are undiscoverable by Reason without Revelation ; I should not hesitate to say, that there may be divers things of that kind : For the free Decrees of God, and his determinations concerning the Government of the World, and the future state of mankind (to name now no others) are things which no humane Reason can pry into, but must owe the fundamental discovery it makes of them, to the Revelation of him, whose purposes they are.

But if, by *things above Reason*, be meant such, as though delivered in words, free from darkness and Ambiguity, are not to be conceived,



and comprehended by our Rational Faculty, I shall freely confess, that I scarce know what to say upon so unusual and sublime a subject.

*Pyrocl.* For my part, Gentlemen, I think it were very requisite to be sure in the first place, that the subject of our Discourses is not Chimerical, but that we can really know, that there are things we cannot comprehend, though they be proposed to us in expressions no less clear than such, as would suffice to make other things intelligible to us.

*Sophr.* Your cautiousness, *Pyrocles*, must not be rejected by *me*, who when, before you came in, I was putting my thoughts into some order, judg'd it unfit to consider, either how one might know what things were to be look'd on as above Reason, how far we may discourse of them, or whether or no any supernaturally revealed Propositions, such as Divines call Articles of Faith, ought

ought to be reckoned among them, till I should have first seriously enquir'd, whether in general we ought to admit any such Objects of our Contemplation, as these, and the like Questions suppose.

*Euge.* I hope then that this being the first thing you purposed to enquire into, we may, without too much boldness, desire to know what came into your mind about it.

*Sophr.* If I had brought my considerations to an issue upon that subject, I should with less reluctancy acquaint you with them; but I since I have yet made but an imperfect progress in my enquiry, instead of delivering any positive opinion upon so abstruse a subject, I shall only tell you, that as far as I could yet discern, it seemed to me that among the Objects, our reason may contemplate there are *some* whose Nature we cannot comprehend, others whose Attributes or Actions are such, as that we cannot understand

how they should belong to the Subject, or else that we cannot conceive how they should consist with some acknowledged Truth.

*Euge.* So that if I apprehend you right, you do not only admit some things to be above Reason, but make no less than three sorts of them.

*Sophr.* If you will needs have two of them to be coincident, I shall not much contend, but I think the number you have named may, without any great inconvenience, be admitted: For by things above Reason I here understand (not false or absurd ones, but) such, as though the Intellect sees sufficient cause (whether on the score of Experience, Authentick Testimony, or Mathematical Demonstration) to assent to, yet it finds it self reduc'd when 'tis conversant about them, to be so with a notable and peculiar disadvantage. And this disadvantage does usually proceed either from the nature of the thing proposed, which is such  
tha

that we cannot sufficiently comprehend it, *or* from our not being able to conceive the manner of its existing and operating ; *or* from this, that it involves some notion or proposition, that we see not how to reconcile with some other thing, that we are perswaded to be a truth. The first of these three sorts of things, may, for brevity and distinction sake be called *Incomprehensible*, the second *Inexplicable*, and the third *Unsociable*. But for fear lest the shortness I have used in my expressions, may have kept them from being so clear, I shall somewhat more explicitly reckon up the three sorts of things that seem to me above Reason.

The first consists of those whose Nature is not distinctly and adequately comprehensible by us : To which sort perhaps we may refer all those intellectual Beings (if it be granted that there are such) as are by nature of a higher order than humane Souls. To which sort some of the Angels (at least of the good ones)



ones ) may probably belong ; but more than probably we may refer to this Head, the Divine Author of Nature, and of our Souls, *Almighty God*, whose perfections are so boundless, and his Nature so very singular, that 'tis no less weakness than presumption to imagine, that such finite Beings as our Souls, can frame full and adequate *Idea's* of them : We may indeed know by the consideration of his works, and particularly those parts of them that we our selves are, both *That he is*, and in a great measure *What he is not* ; but to understand thoroughly *What he is*, is a task too great for any but his own infinite Intellect : And therefore I think we may truly call this immense Object , in the newly declared sence, *supra-Intellectual*.

*Euge.* I suppose I may now ask what is the second sort of Things above Reason ?

*Sophr.* It consists of such , as  
though



though we cannot deny *that they are*, yet we cannot clearly and satisfactorily conceive, *how they can be* such as we acknowledge they are. As how *Matter* can be *infinitely*, (or which is all one, in our present discourse, *indefinitely*) *divisible*: And how there should be such an *incommensurableness* betwixt the Side and Diagonal of a Square, that no measure, how small soever, can adequately measure both the one and the other.

That Matter is endlessly divisible, is not only the assertion of *Aristotle* and the Schools, but generally embraced by those rigid Reasoners, Geometricians themselves; and may be farther confirm'd by the other instance of the Side and *Diagonal* of a Square, whose incommensurableness is believed upon no less firm a proof, than a demonstration of *Euclid*, and was so known a truth among the Ancients, that *Plato* is said to have pronounced him rather a Beast than a Man, that was a stranger to it. And yet if continued  
quantity

quantity be not divisible without stop, how can we conceive but that there may be found some determinate part of the side of a Square, which being often enough repeated, would exactly measure the Diagonal too. But though Mathematical Demonstrations assure us, that these things are so, yet those that have strained their Brains, have not been able clearly to conceive how it should be possible, that a Line (for instance) of not a quarter of an inch long, should be still divisible into lesser and lesser portions, without ever coming to an end of those subdivisions; or how among the innumerable differing partitions into aliquot parts, that may be made of the side of a Square, not one of those parts can be found exactly to measure so short a Line as the Diagonal may be.

*Euge.* There is yet behind, *Sophronius*, the *third* sort of those things, which, according to you, surpass our Reason.

*Sophr.*

*Sophr.* I shall name that too, *Engenius*, as soon as I have premised that some of the Reasons that moved me to refer some instances to this head, do not so peculiarly belong to those instances, but that they may be applicable to others, which 'twas thought convenient to refer to the second or first of the foregoing Heads: And this being once intimated, I shall proceed to tell you, that the *third sort* of things that seem to surpass our Reason, consists of those, to which the Rules and Axioms and Notions, whereby we judge of the truth and falshood of ordinary, or other things, seem not to agree.

This third sort being such as are incumbred with Difficulties or Objections, that cannot directly and satisfactorily be removed by them that acquiesce in the received Rules of subordinate Sciences, and do reason but at the common rate, such Objects of Contemplation as this third sort consists of, having something belonging to them, that seems  
not

not reconcilable with some very manifest, or at least acknowledged Truths.

This it may here suffice to make out by a couple of Instances, the one of a Moral, the other of a Mathematical Nature: And first, that Man has a free will, in reference at least to civil matters, is the general confession of Mankind: All the Laws that forbid and punish Murder, Adultery, Theft, and other Crimes, being founded on a Supposition, that men have a power to forbear committing them, and the sense men have of their being possesst of this power over their own actions, is great enough to make Malefactors acknowledg their punishments to be just, being no less condemned by their own Consciences, than by their Judges.

And yet (some *Socinians*, and some few others excepted) the generality of Mankind, whether Christians, Jews, Mahometans, or Heathens, ascribe to God an infallible Prescience of humane Actions, which



which is supposed by the belief of Prophecies, and the recourse to Oracles, by one or other of which two ways the Embracers of the several Religions newly mentioned, have endeavoured and expected to receive the informations of future things, and such as depend upon the Actings of men. But how a certain fore-knowledg can be had of contingent things, and such as depend upon the free will of man, is that which many great wits that have solicitously tryed, have found themselves unable clearly to comprehend, nor is it much to be admired that they should be puzzled to conceive how an infinitely perfect Being should want Prescience, or that their will should want that liberty, whereof they feel in themselves the almost perpetual exercise.

The other instance I promised you, *Euge.* is afforded me by Geometricians: For these (you know) teach the divisibility of Quantity *in infinitum* or without stop, to be  
Mathe-



Mathematically demonstrable. Give me leave then to propose to you a strait line of three foot long divided into two parts, the one double to the other. I suppose then, that according to their doctrine a line of two foot is divisible into infinite parts, or it is not : If you say it is not, you contradict the demonstrations of the Geometricians ; if you say that it is, then you must confess either that the line of one foot is divisible into as many parts as the line of two foot, though the one be but half the other, or else that the infinite parts , into which the line of one foot is granted to be divisible, is exceeded in number by the parts, into which the line of two foot is divisible, and consequently that the line of two foot has a multitude of parts greater than infinite. Which Reasonings may let us see that we may be reduced *either* to reject Inferences legitimately drawn from manifest or granted Truths, *or* to admit conclusions that appear absurd ; if we *will* have *all* the common

mon Rules whereby we judge of other things to be applicable to Infinites.

And now , Gentlemen , having acquainted you with what sorts of things seem to be above Reason , I must, to prevent mistakes , desire you to take along with you this Advertisement : That though the nobleness and difficulty of so uncultivated a Subject, inclined me to offer something towards the elucidating of it, by sorting those things into three kinds ; yet I shall not, and need not in this Conference, insist on them severally, or lay any stress on this partition. For though I have above intimated, that a Proposition may speak of somewhat that is *supra-intellectual* , or else contain somewhat which we cannot conceive how it may be true , or lastly teach us somewhat for a truth, that we cannot reconcile with some other thing, that we are convinced is true ; yet if but any one of these have true Instances belonging to it, *That* may suffice for my main purpose

pose in this place, where I need only shew in general, *that there may be things that surpass our Reason*, at least so far, that they are not to be judged of by the same measures and rules, by which men are wont to judge of ordinary things, for which reason I shall often give them one common name, calling them *Priviledg'd Things*.

*Euge.* Methinks that to manifest the Imperfections of our Reason, in reference to what you call Priviledg'd Things, you need not have recourse to the unfathomable Abysses of the Divine Nature, since for ought I know, *Pyrocles*, as well as *I*, may be non-plus'd by an instance that came into my mind *de Compositione continui*.

*Timoth.* Since *Sophronius* has not thought fit to give us any of the Arguments of the contending party's, I shall be glad to know what difficulty occur'd to you.

*Euge.* Suppose a great Circle divided

vided into its three hundred and sixty degrees, and suppose that as great a number as you please or can conceive, of strait lines, be drawn from the several designable parts of some one of these degrees, to the Centre, 'tis manifest that the degrees being equal, as many lines may be drawn from any, and so from every one of the others, as from that degree which was pitched upon.

Then suppose a Circular Arch, equal to the assumed degree, to be further bent into the circumference of a little circle, having the same Centre with a great one, it follows from the nature of a Circle, and has been geometrically demonstrated, that the semi-diameters of a Circle how many soever they be, can no where touch one another but in the Centre. Whence 'tis evident, that all the lines that are drawn from the circumference to the Centre of the greater Circle, must pass by differing points of the circumference of the smaller, (for  
C else



else they would touch one another  
 before they arrive at the Centre)  
 and consequently that as many lines  
 soever as can even mentally be  
 drawn from the several points of  
 the circumference of the great Cir-  
 cle to the common Centre of both  
 Circles, must all pass through dif-  
 ferent points of the little Circle, and  
 thereby divide it into as many parts  
 (proportionably smaller) as the  
 greater Circle is divided into: So  
 that here the circumference of the  
 lesser Circle presents us with a  
 curve line, which was not possibly  
 divisible into more parts than an  
 Arch of one degree, or the three  
 hundred and sixtieth part of the  
 Circumference of the greater Cir-  
 cle, and yet without being length-  
 ned, becomes divisible into as ma-  
 ny parts as the whole circumfe-  
 rence of the same greater Circle.  
 And though we should suppose the  
 circumference of the internal Cir-  
 cle not to exceed one inch, and that  
 of the exterior Circle to exceed the  
 circumference of the Terrestrial  
 Globe,



Globe, or even of the Firmament it self, yet still the demonstration would hold, and all the lines drawn from this vast Circle, would find distinct points in the lesser, to pass through to their common Centre.

*Timoth.* Though I will not pretend to confirm what *Sophronius* has been proving, by adding Arguments *a priori*; yet I shall venture to say, that I think it very agreeable both to the nature of God and to that of man, that what he has endeavoured to prove true should be so; for we men mistake and flatter Humane Nature too much, when we think our faculties of Understanding so unlimited, both in point of capacity and of extent, and so free and unprepossest, as many Philosophers seem to suppose: For, whatever our self-love may incline us to imagine, we are really but created and finite Beings (and that probably of none of the highest orders of intellectual Creatures) and we come into the world, but such, as it pleased the Almighty and most

free Author of our Nature to make us. And from this dependency and limitedness of our Natures, it follows not only that we may be (for I now dispute not whether we are) born with certain congenit Notions and Impressions and Appetites or Tendencies of Mind ; but also that the means or measures which are furnished us to employ in the searching or judging of Truth, are but such as are proportionable to Gods designs in creating us, and therefore may probably be supposed not to be capable of reaching to all kinds, or if you please of Truths, *many* of which may be unnecessary for us to know here, and some may be reserved, partly to make us sensible of the imperfections of our Natures, and partly to make us aspire to that condition, wherein our faculties shall be much enlarged and heightned. It seems not therefore unreasonable to think , both that God has made our faculties so limited, that in our present mortal condition there should be some Objects beyond

beyond the comprehension of our Intellects (that is) that some of his creatures should not be able perfectly to understand some others, & yet that he has given us light enough to perceive that we cannot attain to a clear and full knowledge of them.

*Pyrocl.* I think, *Sophronius*, that I now understand what you mean by *Things above reason*, or as you (not unfitly) stiled them, *priviledged things*: But I presume you need not be told, that to explain the sence of a Proposition, and to make out the truth of it, (unless in common Notions, or things evident by their own light) are always two things, and oftentimes two very distant ones.

*Sophr.* I need not scruple, *Pyrocles*, to grant the truth of what you say, but I must not so easily admit your application of it; for among the examples, I have been proposing, there are some at least, that do not only *declare* what I mean by things above reason, but are instan-

ces, and consequently may be *proofs* that such things there are. And to those I could have added others, if I had thought it unlikely, that in the progress of our Conference, there may be occasions offered of mentioning them more opportunely.

*Pyrozl.* I have long thought that the wit of man, was able to lay a fine varnish upon any thing that it would recommend; but I have not till now found Reason set a work to degrade it self, as if it were a noble exercise of its power to establish its own impotency: And indeed 'tis strange to me, how you would have our Reason comprehend and reach things, that you your self confess to be above Reason, which is methinks, as if we were told that we may see things with our eyes that are invisible.

*Sophr.* I do not think, that 'tis to degrade the understanding, to refuse to idolize it, and 'tis not an injury to Reason, to think it a limited faculty, but an injury to the  
Author



Author of it, to think man's understanding infinite, like his. And if what I proposed be well grounded, I assign Reason its most noble and genuine Exercise, which is to close with discovered Truths, in whose embraces the perfection of the Intellect too much consists, to suffer that perfective action to be justly disparaging to it: And a sincere understanding is to give, or refuse its assent to propositions according as they are or are not true, not according as we could or could not wish they were so; and methinks it were somewhat strange, that Impartiality should be made a disparagement in a Judge. But, *Pyrocles*, leaving the reflection with which you usher'd in your Objection, I shall now consider the Argument it self, which being the weightiest that can be framed against the opinion you oppose, I shall beg leave to offer some considerations, wherein I shall endeavour to answer it both by proving my Opinion by experience, and by

Shewing that experience not to be disagreeable to Reason.

*Pyrocl.* I shall very willingly listen to what you have to say on such a subject.

*Sophr.* I shall then in the first place alledge the experience of many persons, and divers of them great Wits, who have perplexed themselves to reconcile, I say, not the Grace of God, but even his Pre-science to the liberty of mans will, even in bare moral actions: And I have found partly by their Writings, and by discourse with some of them, that the most towring and subtle sort of Speculators, Metaphysicians, and Mathematicians, perchance after much racking of their brains, confess themselves quite baffled by the unconquerable difficulties they met with, not only in such abstruse subjects, as the nature of God, or of the humane Soul, but in the nature of what belongs in common to the most obvious Bodies in the world, and even to the least portions of them: You will easily

sily guess that I have my eye on that famous controversie, Whether or no a continued quantity (which every body, as having length, breadth, depth, must be allowed to have) be made up of Indivisibles. Of the perplexing difficulties of this Controversie, I might give you divers confessions, or complaints made by a sort of men too much accustomed to bold assertions and subtle Arguments, to be much disposed to make acknowledgments of that kind: But I shall content my self with the testimony which one of the more famous modern Schoolmen gives both of himself and other learned men, and which if I well remember, he thus expresses. *Aggredi-*

*mur comtinus compositionem, cujus hujusque non separata difficultas omnium Doctorum male ingenia vexavit, neque ullus fuit qui illam non pene insuperabilem agnoscat. Hanc plerique terminorum obscuritate, illorumque replicatis & implicatis distinctionibus, & subdistinctionibus obtenebrant, ne aperte capiantur desperantes rem posse*

Ovid  
contr. 17.  
Phys.

*posse alio modo tractari neque rationis lucem sustinere, sed necessario confessionis tenebris obtegendum, ne argumentorum evidentia detegatur.*

And though he had not been thus candid in his confession, yet what he says might be easily concluded by him, that shall duly weigh with how great, though not equal force of Arguments, each of the contending parties imputes to the opinion it opposes, great and intolerable absurdities as contained in it, or legitimately deducible from it.

*Eug.* I have not the vanity to think that the weakness of my Reason ought to make another diffident of the strength of his: But as to my self, what *Sophronius* has been saying cannot but be confirm'd by several tryals, wherein having exerted the small abilities I had to clear up to my self some of the difficulties about Infinites: I perceived to my trouble, that my speculations satisfied me of nothing so much, as the disproportionateness of those abstruse subjects to my reason. But,  
*Sopbro-*



*Sophronius*, may it not be well objected, that though the Instances you have given, have not been hitherto cleared by the light of Reason; yet 'tis probable they may be so hereafter, considering how great progress is, from time to time, made in the discoveries of Nature, in this learned Age of ours.

*Sophr.* In answer to this question, *Eugenius*, give me leave to tell you first, that you allow my past discourse to hold good *for ought yet appears to the contrary*: Whence it will follow, that your Objection is grounded upon a hope, or at most a Conjecture about which I need not therefore trouble my self, till some new discoveries about the things in question, engage me to a new consideration of them. But in the mean while, give me leave to represent to you in the second place, that though I am very willing to believe, as well as I both desire and hope it, that this inquisitive Age we live in, will produce discoveries that will explicate divers of the  
more

more hidden mysteries of Nature, yet I expect that these discoveries will chiefly concern those things, which either we are ignorant of for want of a competent History of Nature, or we mistake by reason of erroneous Prepossessions, or for want of freedom and attention in our speculations. But I have not the like expectations as to all Metaphysical difficulties, (if I may so call them) wherein neither matters of Fact, nor the *Hypotheses* of subordinate parts of Learning, are wont much to avail. But however it be, as to other abstruse Objects, I am very apt to think, that there are some things relating to that infinite and most Monadical Being (if I may so speak) that we call *God*, which will still remain incomprehensible even to Philosophical understandings. And I can scarce allow my self to hope to see those Obstacles surmounted, that proceed not from any Personal infirmity, or evitable faults, but from the limited nature of the Intellect:

And

And to these two considerations, *Eugenius*, I shall in answer to your question, add this also: That as mens inquisitiveness may hereafter extricate some of those grand difficulties, that have hitherto perplexed Philosophers; so it may possibly lead them to discover new difficulties more capable than the first, of baffling humane understandings. For even among the things where-with we are already conversant, there are divers which we think we know, only because we never with due attention, tryed whether we can frame such *Ideas* of them, as are clear and worthy for a rational seeker and lover of truth to acquiesce in. This the great intricacy that considering men find, in the notions commonly receiv'd of space, time, motion, &c. and the difficulties of framing perspicuous and satisfactory apprehensions even of such obvious things, may render highly probable. We see also that the Angle of Contact, the Doctrine of *Asymptotes*, and that of surd numbers

bers and incommensurable Lines, all which trouble not common Accountants and Surveyors, (who though they deal so much in numbers and lines, seldom take notice of any of them) perplex the greatest Mathematicians, and some of them so much, that they can rather demonstrate, that such affections belong to them, than they can conceive how they can do so: All which may render it probable, that mens growing curiosity is not more likely to find the solutions of some difficulties, than to take notice of other things, that may prove more insuperable than they.

*Tim.* This conjecture of yours, *Sophronius*, is not a little favoured by the *Rota Aristotelica*; for though the motion of a Cart-wheel is so obvious and seems so plain a thing, that the Carman himself never looks upon it with wonder; yet after *Aristotle* had taken notice of the difficulty that occur'd about it, this trivial *Phænomenon* has perplex'd divers great Wits, not only School-



Schoolmen, but Mathematicians, and continues yet to do so, there being some circumstances in the progressive motion and rotation of the circumference of a Wheel, and its Nave, or of two points assigned, the one in the former, and the other in the latter, that have appeared too subtle (and even to modern) Writers, so hard to be conceived and reconciled to some plain and granted Truths, that some of them have given over the solution of the attending difficulties as desperate, which perchance, *Pyrocles*, would not think strange, if I had time to insist on the intricacies that are to be met with in a speculation, that seems so easie as to be despicable.

*Sophr.* Your Instance, *Timotheus*, must be acknowledged a very pregnant one, if you are certain that a better account cannot be given of the *Rota Aristotelica*, than is wont to be in the Schools, by those Peripateticks that either frankly confess the difficulties to be insoluble, or less ingenuously pretend to give solutions

solutions of them , that suppose things not to be proved, or perhaps so much as understood (as Rarefaction and Condensation strictly so called) or lose the question and perhaps themselves, by running up the dispute into that most obscure and perplexing Controversie *de compositione continui*.

*Eugen.* I am content to forbear pressing any further at present an Objection ; much of whose force depends on future contingents, and I shall the rather dismiss the proof drawn from experience, that I may the sooner put you in mind of your having promised us another Argument to the same purpose, by manifesting the opinion to be agreeable to Reason.

*Sophr.* I understand your pleasure, *Eugenius*, and shall endeavour to comply with it, but the difficulty and intricateness of the Subject of our discourse, obliges me to do it by steps ; and for fear we should want time for more necessary things, I will not now stay to examine

mine whether all the things that hitherto have appeared above Reason, be impenetrable to us, because of an essential disability of our understandings, proceeding from the imperfection and limitedness of their nature, or only because of some other impediment, such as may be especially the condition of the soul in this life, or the infirmities resulting from its state of union with a gross and mortal body.

Forbearing then to discourse how this came into my mind, and what thoughts I had upon it, I shall proceed in my considerations; and to clear the way for those that are to follow, I shall in the first place observe to you, that whatever be thought of the faculty *in abstracto*, yet Reason operates according to certain Notions or Ideas, and certain Axiomes and Propositions, by which as by Prototypes or Models, and Rules and Measures, it conceives things, and makes estimates and judgments of them. And indeed when we say that such a thing

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is consonant to Reason, or repugnant to it , we usually mean that it is either immediately or mediately deducible from, or at least consistent with , or contradictory to one or other of those standard Notions or Rules.

And this being premis'd, I consider in the next place, that if these Rules and Notions be such, as are abstracted only from finite things, or are congruous but to them ; they may prove useless or deceitful to us, when we go about to stretch them beyond their measure, and apply them to the infinite God , or to things that involve an Infiniteness either in multitude, magnitude, or littleness.

To illustrate and confirm this notion, give me leave to represent in the third place, that in my opinion all the things that we naturally do know or can know, may be divided into these two sorts: The one such as we may know without a *Medium* ; and the other such as we cannot attain to, but by the intervention of  
*a Me-*



a *Medium*, or by a discursive act. To the first belong such Notions as are supposed to be *connate*, or if you please *innate*, such as that *Two contradictories cannot be both together true*. The whole is greater than any part of it; *Every (entire) number is either even or odd, &c.* And also those other Truths, that are assented to upon their own account without needing any *medium* to prove them; because that as soon as, by perspicuous terms, or fit examples, they are clearly proposed to the understanding, they discover themselves to be true so manifestly by their own light, that they need not be assisted by any intervening Proposition, to make the Intellect acquiesce in them; of which kind are some of *Euclids Axioms*, as that, *If to equal things equal things be added, the totals will be equal*; and that *two right lines cannot include a space*. To the second sort of things knowable by us, belong all that we acquire the knowledge of by *Ratiocinations*, wherein by the help of

intervening Propositions or *Medi-  
ums*, we deduce one thing from a-  
nother, or conclude affirmatively  
or negatively one thing of another.  
This being supposed, and we being  
conscious to our selves, if it were  
but upon the score of our own infir-  
mities and imperfections, that we  
are not Authors of our own nature;  
for ought we know it may be true,  
and all the experience we have hi-  
therto had, leads us to think it is  
true, that the measures suggested  
to us either by sensations, the re-  
sults of sensible observation, or the  
other instruments of knowledge,  
are such as fully reach but to finite  
things or Beings, and therefore are  
not safely applicable to others. And  
divers of those very Principles that  
we think very general, may be (if  
I may so speak) but gradual notions  
of truth, and but limited and re-  
spective, not absolute and univer-  
sal.

And here give me leave, as a far-  
ther consideration, to take notice to  
you, that though perfect Syllogisms  
be

be counted the best and most regular forms that our Ratiocinations can assume, yet even the laws of these are grounded on the doctrine of Proportions : For even between things equal there may be a proportion (namely that of equality) upon which ground I suppose it is, that Mathematical Demonstrations have been publickly proposed of the grand Syllogistical Rules. And in consequence of this, I shall add that Geometricians will tell you, that there is no proportion betwixt a finite line and an infinite, because the former can never be so often taken, as to exceed the latter, which according to *Euclid's* definition of Proportion, it should be capable to do. Of which Premises the use I would make is to perswade you, that since the understanding operates but by the Notions and Truths 'tis furnished with, and these are its instruments by proportion to which it takes measures, and makes judgments of other things ; these Instruments may be too disproportionate

*Rationem  
habere inter  
se quantita-  
tes dicuntur  
que possunt  
multiplica-  
ta, sese mu-  
tuo superare.  
Definit. 5.  
Elem. V.  
Euclidis.*

tionate to some Objects to be securely employed to determine divers particulars about them : So the eye being an instrument which the understanding employs to estimate distances, we cannot by that safely take the bredth of the Ocean, because our sight cannot reach far enough to discover how far so vast an object extends it self. And *not only* the common instruments of Surveyors that would serve to measure the height of an house or a steeple, or even a Mountain, cannot enable them to take the distance of the Moon ; *but*, when Astronomers do, by supposition, take a chain that reaches to the Centre of the Earth, (and therefore is by the Moderns judged to be near four thousand miles long) even then I say, *though* by the help of this and the Parallaxes, they may tolerably well measure the distance of some of the neerer Planets, especially the Moon ; yet with all their great industry, they cannot by the same way (or perhaps any other yet known) with  
any



any thing tolerable acurateness, measure the distance of the fixed Stars; the Semidiameter of the Earth, bearing no sensible proportion to that of so vast a Sphere as the Firmament, whose distance makes the Parallaxes vanish, it being as to sense all one, whether at so great a remove, a Star be observ'd from the Centre, or from the surface of the Earth.

*Eug.* In a matter so abstruse, a little Illustration by examples, may be very proper and welcome.

*Sophr.* 'Tis scarce possible to find very apposite examples, to illustrate things of a kind so abstruse and heteroclite as those may well be suppos'd, that do surpass our Reason.

But yet some assistance may be borrowed from what we may observe in that other faculty of the mind, which is most of kin to the Intellect, I mean the *Imagination*: For when, for instance, I think of a Triangle or a Square, I find in my fancy an intuitive *Idea* (if I may so

call it) of those figures that is a Picture clear and distinct, as if a figure of three sides or four equal sides, and Angles were placed before my eyes.

But if I would fancy a *myriagon*, or a figure consisting of ten thousand equal sides, my Imagination is overpowered with so great a multitude of them, and frames but a confused *Idea* of a *Polygon* with a very great many sides: For if (to speak suitably to what the excellent *Des Cartes* has well observed in the like case) a man should endeavour to frame *Ideas* of a *Myriagon* or a *Chiliagon*, they would be both so confused, that his Imagination would not be able clearly to discriminate them, though the one has ten times as many sides as the other. So if you would imagine an Atome, of which perhaps ten thousand would scarce make up the bulk of one of the light particles of dust, that seem to play in the Sunbeams when they are shot into a darkned place, so extraordinary a littleness  
not

not having fallen under any of our Senses, cannot truly be represented in our imagination. So when we speak of Gods Primity (if I may so call it) Omnipotence, and some other of his infinite Attributes and Perfections, we have some conceptions of the things we speak of, but may very well discern them to be but inadequate ones: And though divers Propositions relating to things above Reason, seem clear enough to ordinary Wits, yet he that shall with a competent measure of attention, curiosity, and skill, consider and examine them; shall find that either their parts are inconsistent with one another, or they involve contradictions to some acknowledged or manifest Truths, or they are veil'd over with darkness and incumbered with difficulties, from whence we are not able to rescue them. Thus when the side and Diagonal of a Square are proposed, we have clear and distinct *Ideas* of each of them apart, and when they are compared, we  
may

may have a conception of their incommensurableness. But yet this negative notion, if it be thoroughly considered, and far enough pursued, clearly contains that of a strait lines being divisible *in infinitum*; and that divisibility is incumbred with so many difficulties, and is so hard to be reconciled to some confessed dictates of Reason, that (as we have seen already) Philosophers and Geometricians that are convinc'd of the truth, are to this day labouring to extricate themselves out of those perplexing intricacies.

I will not trouble you with the puzzling, if not insuperable difficulties, that incumber the doctrine of *Eternity*, as 'tis wont to be proposed in the Schools of Divines and Philosophers, lest you should alledge that these difficulties spring rather from the bold assumptions and groundless subtleties of the Schoolmen, than from the nature of the thing it self: But I will propose somewhat that cannot be denied,



denied, which is, that some substance or other, whether, as I believe, *God*, or as the Peripateticks say, the *World*, or as the Epicureans contend, *Matter*, never had a beginning, that is, has been for ever. But when we speak of an eternity *à parte ante* (as they call it) we do not speak of a thing whereof we have no conception at all, as will appear to a considering person, and yet this general notion we have is such, that when we come attentively to examine it, by the same ways by which we judge of almost all other things, the Intellect is non-plus'd: For we must conceive, that the time efflux'd since *Adam* (or any other man as remote from us as he is said to have been) began to live, bears no more proportion to the duration of *God*, or of *Matter*, than to those few minutes I have employed about mentioning this instance. Nay if we would be Aristotelians, the same thing may be said as to those men, that lived many thousand millions of years before

before the time we reckon that *Adam* began to live in : For each of these times being finite and measurable by a determinate number of years, can bear no proportion to that infinite number of years (or somewhat that is equivalent) which must be allowed to a duration that never had a beginning. And as there are some things whose nature and consequences pose our Faculties, so there are others, whereof though we have a notion, yet the *modus operandi* is beyond our comprehension ; I do not mean only the true and certain *modus operandi*, but even an *intelligible* one. As, though divers learned men, especially Cartesianes, and that upon a Philosophical account, assert, that God created the world ; yet how a substance could be made out of nothing (as they, and the generality of Christians confessedly hold ) I fear we cannot conceive. And though all Philosophers, very few excepted, believe God to be the *Maker* of the World (out of pre-existent

existent matter) yet how he could make it but by locally moving the parts of the Matter it was to consist of, and how an incorporeal substance can move a body, which it may pass through without resistance, is that which I fear will be found hardly explicable: For if it be said, that the Soul, being an immaterial substance, can never the less move the Limbs of the humane Body rightly dispos'd, I shall answer that it does not appear that the rational Soul doth give any motion to the parts of the Body, but only *guide* or *regulate* that which she finds in them already.

*Timoth.* May it not then be rationally said, that by making observations of such things that are the proper Objects of our faculties, and by making legitimate deductions from such observations, and from our other knowledges whether innate or acquired, we may come to be certain, that some things are, and so have general and dark *Ideas* of them, when at the same time

time we are at a loss to conceive *how they can be* such, or how they can operate and perform what they do, supposing the Truth and sufficiency of some other things we are convinced of. To be short, negative apprehensions we may have of some priviledged things, and positive, but indistinct apprehensions we may have of others, and that is enough to make us in some sort understand our selves, and one another, when we speak of them, though yet when we sufficiently consider what we say, we may find that our words are not accompanied with clear, distinct, and symmetrical conceptions, of those abstruse and perplexing things we speak of. And since, as hath been already shewn, we find by experience, that we are unable sufficiently to comprehend things, that by clear and legitimate consequences may be evinc'd to *be*, why should not this cogently argue, that some of our conceptions may be of things, to which somewhat belongs that



that transcends our Reason , and surpasses our comprehension? And if I would play the Logician with *Pyrocles*, I would tell him that his Objection destroys his Opinion : For since he talks to us of what is incomprehensible, that term must or must not be attended with some suitable *Idea* : If it be not, let him consider, whether in his own Phrase he speaks sense and not like a Parrot ; but if it be, let him then confess, that one may have some kind of *Idea* of a thing incomprehensible. But , *Pyrocles* , whether or no you think I prevaricate in this, you will not, I hope, suspect me of doing it, in adding that when natural Theology had taught men, (as well Philosophers as others) to believe God to be an infinitely perfect Being, we ought not to say that they had no *Idea* of such a Being, because they had not a *clear and adequate* one. And since *Aristotle* discourses *ex professo* and prolixly enough, *de infinito*, and cites the ancients Philosophers for having  
done

done so before him, and since (besides his Commentators and Followers) *Democritus*, *Epicurus*, followed by *Gassendus* and other late Philosophers, maintain either that the world is boundless, or that space (real or imaginary) is not *finite* in *extent*, or that the world consists of *Atoms infinite in number*; I hope you will not put such an affront upon all these great persons, as to think they said they knew not what, when they discoursed *de infinito*, as they must have done, if they spake without *Ideas* of the things they spake of, though it may be justly supposed, that the Subject being *infinite*, the *Ideas* they framed of it, could not be *comprehensive* and accurate.

*Eug.* So that according to you, *Sophronius*, it may be said, that by reason we do not properly *perceive Things above Reason*, but only *perceive that they are above Reason*, there being a dark and peculiar kind of Impression made upon the understanding, while it sets it self  
to

to contemplate such confounding Objects, by which peculiarity of impression, as by a distinct and unwonted kind of internal sensation, the understanding is brought to distinguish this sort of things (namely) transcendent or *priviledg'd* ones from others, and discern them to be disproportionate to the powers with which it uses throughly to penetrate Subjects, that are not impervious to it. As when the Eye looks into a deep Sea, though it may pierce a little way into it, yet when it would look deeper, it discovers nothing but somewhat which is dark and indistinct, which affects the sensory so differingly from what other more genuine objects are wont to do, that by it we easily discern, that our sight fails us in the way before it arrives at the bottom, and consequently that there may be many things conceal'd there, that our sight is unable to reach.

*Timoth.* I guess, Gentlemen, how  
the silence you seem to conspire

E

Eng.

after so long a debate, that you have now said as much as at present you think fit to say for and against this Proposition, that there are Things above our Reason.

*Sophr.* I shall not, for my part, cross your Observation, *Timotheus*, but instead of adding any new proofs, shall only desire you to look back upon those I have presented you already, and to let me remind you, that of the two Arguments by which I attempted to shew that there are some things above Reason, the first and chiefest was suggested by Experience, and the other which was drawn from the nature of things and of man, was brought as 'twere, *ex abundanti*, to illustrate and confirm the former, and give occasion to some hints about priviledg'd Subjects. And therefore though I hope what has been discours'd by these Gentlemen and me, may be able to perswade *Pyrocles*, that the acknowledgment ~~hat~~ some things are above Reason ~~un~~ fairly comply with the dictates



States of it, yet whatever he thinks of the cogency of our discourse, the truth of the main conclusion may be sufficiently evinc'd by our first Argument drawn from experience : For if we really find, that there are things which our Reason cannot comprehend, then whether the account these Gentlemen and I have given, why our faculties are insufficient, for these things be good or not; yet still some true account or other there must be of that insufficiency. And as we should very thankfully receive from *Pyrocles*, any better account than what we have propounded, so if he cannot assign any better, I hope he will joyn with us in looking upon this, as very agreeable to our Hypothesis; since hereby some things must appear to us so sublime and abstruse, that not only we find we are not able to comprehend them, but that we are unable to discern so much as upon what account it is that they cannot be comprehended by us.

*Eng.* I am not averſe, *Sophroni-  
us*, from your Paradox about *gra-  
dual* notions, and I am the more in-  
clin'd to think, that ſome of the  
Axioms and Rules that are reputed  
to be very general, are not to be in-  
differently extended to all Subjects  
and caſes whatſoever; when I con-  
ſider the differing apprehenſions  
that the mind may frame of the  
ſame object, as well according to  
the vigour or (if I may ſo call it)  
rank of the underſtanding, as ac-  
cording to the differing informati-  
on 'tis furniſhed with: For if one  
ſhould propoſe to a child, for in-  
ſtance, of four or five years old,  
the demonſtration of the one hun-  
dred and ſeventeenth Proposition  
of *Euclid's* tenth Book, wherein he  
proves the ſide and Diagonal of  
a Square to be incommenſura-  
ble, though poſſibly he may be a-  
ble to read the words that expreſs  
the *Theorem*, and though he have  
eyes to ſee the Scheme employed  
for the demonſtration, yet if you  
ſhould ſpend a whole year about it,  
you

you would never be able to make him understand it, because 'tis quite above the reach of a Childs capacity: And if one should stay till he be grown a man, yet supposing him to have never learned Geometry, though he may easily know what you mean by two incommensurable lines, yet all the reason he has attained to in his virile age, would but indispose him to attain to that demonstration; for all the experience he may have had of lines, will but have suggested to him as a manifest and general truth, that of any two strait lines we may by measuring find how many Feet, Inches, or other determinate measure, the one exceeds the other. And though one that has been orderly instructed in all that long train of Propositions, that in *Euclid's* Elements precede the one hundred and seventeenth of the tenth Book, will be also able to arrive at an evidence of this truth; *that those two Lines are incommensurable*; yet (as *Sophronius* formerly

E 3                      noted)

noted) how it should be possible that two short Lines being proposed, whereof each by it self is easily measurable among those innumerable multitudes of parts into which each of them may be mentally divided, there should not be any one capable of exactly measuring both, is that which even a Geometrician that knows it is true, is not well able to conceive. But, Gentlemen, that you may not accuse my digression, I shall urge these comparisons no further, my scope in mentioning them being to observe to you, that for ought we know to the contrary, such a difference of intellectual Abilities as is but gradual in Children and Men, may be essential in differing ranks of Intellectual Beings. And so it may be, that some of those Axioms that we think general, may, when we apply them to things whereof they are not the true and proper measures, lead us into error, though perhaps Intellects of an higher order may unriddle those difficulties that



that confound us men, which conjecture I should confirm by some things that would be readily granted me by Christians, if I thought it proper to play the Divine in a discourse purely Philosophical.

*Pyrocl.* You, Gentlemen, have taken the liberty to make long discourses, and I shall not much blame you for it, because 'tis a thing as more easily, so more speedily done, to propose difficulties than to solve them; yet methinks amongst you all, you have left one part of my Objection unanswer'd, not to say untouch'd.

*Sophr.* I suppose, *Pyrocles*, you mean what you said about discerning invisible things with the Eye, but I purposely forbore to take notice of *that*, because I foresaw it might be more seasonably done, after some other points had been clear'd: Wherefore give me leave *now* to represent to you, as a Corollary from the foregoing discourses, that nothing hinders but that we may reasonably suppose, that

the great and free Author of humane nature, God, so framed the nature of Man, as to have furnish'd his Intellectual Faculty with a light, whereby it cannot only make estimates of the power of a multitude of other things, but also judge of its own nature and power, and discern some at least of the limits beyond which it cannot safely exercise its act of particularly and peremptorily judging and defining. And now that God, who (as I said) is a most free Agent, may have given the mind of Man such a limited nature, accompanied with such a measure of light, you will not I presume deny but the question is, you will tell me, whether he *hath* done so? But I hope what has been formerly discoursed by these Gentlemen and me, has put that almost quite out of question. However, I shall now invite you to observe with me, that the Rational Soul does not only pass judgments about things without her, but about her self, and what passes within her;  
She

She searches out and contemplates her own spirituality and union with the Body. The Intellect judges wherein its own nature consists, and whether or no it self be a distinct faculty from the Will ; and to come yet closer to the point, be pleased to consider, that Logick and Metaphysicks are the works of the Humane Intellect , which by framing those disciplines , manifests, that it does not only judge of Ratiocinations, but of the very Principles and Laws of Reasoning, and teaches what things are necessary to the obtaining of an Evidence and Certainty , and what kind of *Mediums* they are from whence you must not expect any demonstrative Arguments , concerning such or such a subject. To these things it is agreeable, that if we will compare the bodily Eye with the Understanding, which is the Eye of the Mind, we must allow this difference, that the Intellect is as well a Looking-glass as a Sensory, since it does not only see other things but  
it

it self too, and can discern its own blemishes or bad conformation, or whatever other infirmities it labours under. Upon which consideration, we may justifie the boldness of our excellent *Verulam*, who when he sets forth the four sorts of Idols (as he calls them) that mislead the students of Philosophy, makes one of them to be *Idola Tribus*, by which he means those Notions, that tho' radicated in the very nature of mankind, are yet apt to mislead us, which may confirm what I was saying before, that the Soul, when duly excited, is furnished with a light, that may enable her to judge even of divers of those original Notions, by which she is wont to judge of other things. To be short, the Soul upon tryal may find by an inward sence, that some things surpass her forces, as a blind man that were set to lift up a rock would quickly find it too unweildy to be manag'd by him, and the utmost exercise of his strength would but convince him of the insufficiency of



of it, to surmount so great a weight or resistance ; so that we do not pretend that the Eye of the Mind should see Invisibles, but only that it shall discern the limits of that Sphere of Activity, within which Nature hath bounded it, and consequently that some Objects are disproportionate to it. And I remember that *Aristotle* himself says, that the eye sees both light and darkness, which expression, though somewhat odd, may be defended by saying, that though since darkness is a Privation, not a Being, it cannot properly be the object of sight, yet it may be perceived by means of the Eye, by the very differing affection which that Organ resents, when it is impressed on by luminous or enlightened Objects, and when it is made useless to us by darkness.

*Timoth.* What you have said, *Sophronius*, has in great part prevented one thing that might be said to strengthen *Pyrocles* his objection, namely, that *whereas* when we see with our bodily eyes, there is besides

sides the outward Organ an internal and rational faculty, that perceives by the help of the eye, that which is not directly the object of sight in the Eye of the Mind, the Intellect, there is but one faculty to perceive and judge: For according to your notion, it may be well answered, that the Intellect being capable by its proper light, to judge of it self and its own acts as well as of other things, there is no need of two Principles, the one to perceive and the other to judge, since one is sufficient for both those purposes.

*Pyrocl.* When I have time to reflect on all that I have heard alledg'd amongst you, Gentlemen, I shall consider how far your Arguments ought to obtain my assent: But in the mean while I must tell you, that they will scarce have all the success I presume you desire, unless you add somewhat to free me from what yet sticks with me of a scruple, that is much of the nature of that which I formerly proposed, being this;  
*How we can justify our presuming to discourse*

*discourse at all of things transcending Reason?* For I cannot understand how a man that admits your opinions, can intelligibly speak (and to speak otherwise mis-becomes a rational creature) of what is infinite or any thing that surpasses our reason; since when we discourse of such things, either our words are, or are not accompanied with clear and distinct *Ideas* or conceptions of the things we speak of: If *they be not*, what do we other than speak nonsense, or (as hath been already said) like Parrots entertain our Hearers with words, that we our selves do not understand; and if *they be*, then we do in effect comprehend those things, which yet you would have me think to be on some account or other, *Incomprehensible*.

*Sophr.* I acknowledge this difficulty, *Pyrocles*, to be a great one; but yet I think it not so great as that it ought to interdict us all discoursing of things above Reason: And this would perhaps appear probable enough, if, as your objection borrows

rows much of what you have formerly alledg'd, so I may be allowed, as well to repeat some things as propose others, in making answer to it.

*Timoth.* I for my part shall not only give you my consent to do so, but make it my request that you would do it, for when I look back upon our conference, methinks I plainly perceive that partly the objections of *Pyrocles*, and partly some (I fear impertinent) interpositions of mine, have kept your discourse from being so methodical as otherwise you would have made it, and therefore to be reminded of some of the chief points of your doctrine, as well as to connect them with those you shall judge fit to strengthen or illustrate them, may much conduce to make us both understand it more clearly, and remember it better.

*Eug.* I am much of your mind, *Timotheus*, but though my interpositions have been far more frequent and much less pertinent than yours, yet I am not troubled that  
the



the method of our conference has been so much disturb'd ; because I think such a free way of discoursing, wherein emergent thoughts if they be considerable , are permitted to appear as they arise in the mind, is more useful than a nice method in a debate about an uncultivated and highly important subject, in which I think we should aim at first rather to inquire than to resolve, and to procure as many hints and considerations as we can, in order to our fuller information against our next meeting, without suppressing any that is true or useful, only because it agrees not so well with a regular method, as it does with the design of our conference.

*Sophr.* Without reflecting upon either of those Gentlemen that have been pleased to accuse themselves, I shall readily comply with the motion made by *Timotheus*, and after having proposed some distinctions make application of them.

And the better to clear this matter in reference to *Pyrocles's* objection,

on, I shall first take the liberty to make some distinctions of the Notions or conceptions of the Mind, and for brevity sake give names to those I have now occasion to employ. I consider then, that whether the conceptions or *Ideas* we have of things be simple or compounded, they may be distinguished into such as are particular or *distinct*, and such as are only general, dark, and confus'd, or indistinct: So when a Navigator to unknown Countries first gets a sight of Land, though he may be satisfied that it is Land, yet he has but a very dark and confus'd picture of it made in his eye, and cannot descry whether or no the shore be rocky, or what Creeks or Harbours ( if any ) it have in it; much less whether the Coast be well inhabited, and if it be, what kind of buildings it has; all which he may plainly and distinctly see upon his going ashore. And this mention of the Sea puts me in mind to point at another distinction, which is that of some things we have

have an *adequate*, of others, but an *inadequate* conception; as if we suppose the Navigator I was speaking of, should look towards the main Sea, though he might see a good way distinctly, yet at length it would appear so darkly and confusedly to him, that at the verge of the sensible Horizon, his sight would make him judge that the Sea and Sky come together, and yet he would conclude that the utmost part of the Sea he could descry, was but a part of the Ocean, which may, for ought he knows, reach to a vast extent beyond the visible Horizon.

To our confused, and often also to our inadequate conceptions, belong many of those that may be called Negative, which we are wont to imploy when we speak of Privations or Negations, as Blindness, Ignorance, Death, &c. We have a positive *Idea* of things that are square and round, and black and white, and in short of other things, whose shapes and colours make

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them the objects of our sight : But when we say, for instance , that a Spirit or an Atome is invisible , those words are attended with a negative conception , which is commonly but dark and confused because 'tis indefinite , and removes or lays aside those marks, by which we are wont clearly to perceive and distinguish visible substances : And when we say that such a thing is impossible, we have some kind of conception of what we speak of, but 'tis a very obscure and indistinct one at best, exhibiting only a general and very confused representation of some ways, whereby one might think the thing likely to be effected if it were at all performable, accompanied with a perception of the insufficiency of those ways. There is yet another difference in the notions we have of things, which though not wont to be observed, is too important to be here pretermitted, and it is this: That of some things we have a knowledg, that for want of a fitter term



term may be called primary or direct, and of some other things the knowledge we have is acquired but by inferring it from some more known or clearer truth ; and so may be called inferr'd or illative knowledge. As when a Geometrician defines to me an *Hyperbole*, I quickly gain a clear and distinct *Idea* of it, but when he proves to me that this *Hyperbole* may have such a relation to a strait line which he calls *Asymptote*, that this line being continued still comes nearer and nearer to the prolonged side of the *Hyperbole*, and yet how far soever both be drawn, 'twill never come to touch it, his subtil demonstrations present me with an infer'd or illative truth, at which we arriv'd not but by the help of a train of ratiocinations, and on which if we exercise our imagination, we shall find this factitious truth, if we may so call it, accompanied but with a very dim and confused *Idea*. To the foregoing distinctions, give me leave to add but this one more,

which belongs chiefly to the notions we have of true or false propositions, namely, that of our conceptions of things, some are *Symmetrical* (if I may so call them) or every way consistent, by which I mean those that have these two qualifications, the *one* that all the parts are consistent among themselves, and the *other* that the entire *Idea* is consistent with all other truths; and some are *Chymetical* or *Asymmetrical*, by which I understand those that are *either* self-destroying by the contrariety of the parts themselves they are made up of, as if one should talk of a triangular square, or a Sunshiny night; *or* being extravagant, lead to some manifest absurdity, that may be legitimately inferred from them, or into inextricable difficulties, or involve a real repugnancy to some acknowledg'd truth, or rule of Reason.

To what I have hitherto said, I must add these two observations: The First, that the mind of Man is so framed, that when she is duly instructed

instructed and is not wanting to her self, she can perceive a want of light in her self for some purposes, or of clearness and completeness in the best *Ideas* she is able to frame of some things, and on this account can so far take notice of the extent and imperfection of her own faculties, as to discern that some objects are disproportionate to her ; As when we attentively consider the dimensions of space, or (if the Cartesians judge aright, that body is nothing but extended substance ) those of the Universe, we may by tryal perceive that we cannot conceive them so great, but that they may be yet greater, or if you please may exceed the bounds, how remote soever, which our former conception presum'd to assign them; which may be illustrated by what happens to the eye, when it looks upon the main Sea; since we easily grow sensible that how far soever we can discover it, yet our sight falls far short of the extent of that vast object. And 'tis by the sense

which the mind has of her own limitedness and imperfection on certain occasions, that I think we may estimate what things ought not, and what ought to be looked upon as *Things above Reason*; for by that Term, I would not have you think I mean such things as our rational faculty cannot at all reach to, or has not any kind of perception of, for of such things we cannot in particular either speak or think like men: But my meaning is this, that whereas the rational Soul is conscious to her own acts, and feels, that she knows divers sorts of things truly and clearly; and thereby justly concludes them to be within the compass of her faculties; when she contemplates some few things that seem to be of another order, she is convinc'd that however she strain her power, she has no such *Idea* or perception of them, as she has or may have of those objects that are not disproportionate to her faculties: And this is my first Observation,



The other thing that I was to observe about the nature of the Mind is, that 'tis so constituted, that its faculty of drawing consequences from known truths, is of greater extent than its power of framing clear and distinct *Ideas* of things; so that by subtle or successive inferences, it may attain to a clear conviction that some things *are*, of whose nature and properties (or at least of some of them) it can frame no clear and satisfactory conceptions. And that men should be better able to infer propositions about divers things, than to penetrate their nature, needs the less be wondered at, *both* because 'tis oftentimes sufficient for our uses to know that such things are, though that knowledge be not accompanied with a clear and distinct *Idea*; and because oftentimes the Rules (such as, *whatever is produced must have a cause*; and, *from Truth, nothing rightly follows but Truth*) are clear and easie that enable the Mind to infer conclusions about things, whose nature

is very dark, and abstruse.

*Eug.* I know, *Sophronius*, that you have not laid down these preliminary distinctions and remarks without designing to make use of them, which the little time that now remains to manage our conference in, calls upon you to proceed to do.

*Sophr.* I was just going to say, *Eugenius*, that after what I have premised, I hope it may now be seasonable to apply the newly delivered Notions to the three sorts of things that I formerly represented as being in some sence *above reason*. For I consider, that there are some objects of so immense and peculiar a nature, that (if I may so speak) by an easie view of the mind, that is without any subtle and laborious disquisition, the Soul discerns, and as it were feels the Object to be disproportionate to her powers: And accordingly if she thinks fit to try, she quickly finds her self unable to frame conceptions of them fit to be acquiesc'd in, and this sort of Objects

jects I do upon that account call inconceivable, or (on some occasions) *supra-intellectual*.

But when by attentively considering the attributes and operations of things, we sometimes find that a thing hath some property belonging to it, or doth perform somewhat, which by reflecting on the beings and ways of working that we know already, we cannot discern to be reducible to them or derivable from them, we then conclude this property or this operation to be *inexplicable*; that is, such as that it cannot so much as in a general way be intelligibly accounted for, and this makes the second sort of our things above Reason. But this is not all, for the Rational Soul that is already furnished with innate, or at least primitive *Ideas* and Rules of true and false, when she comes to examine certain things and make successive inferences about them, she finds (sometimes to her wonder as well as trouble) that she cannot avoid admitting some  
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consequences as true & good which she is not able to reconcile to some other manifest Truth or acknowledged Proposition : And whereas other Truths are so harmonious, that there is no disagreement between any two of them, the Heteroclite Truths I speak of appear not symmetrical with the rest of the body of Truths, and we see not how we can at once embrace these and the rest, without admitting that grand absurdity which subverts the very foundation of our reasonings, *That Contradictories may both be true.*

As in the controversie about the endless divisibility of a strait line, since 'tis manifest that a line of three foot for instance is thrice as long as a line of one foot, so that the shorter line is but the third part of the longer, it would follow that a part of a line may contain as many parts as a whole, since each of them is divisible into infinite parts, which seems repugnant to common sence, and to contradict one of those common Notions in *Euclid*, whereon  
Geometry



Geometry it self is built. Upon which account I have ventured to call this third sort of things above Reason *Asymmetrical* or *Unsociable*, of which eminent instances are afforded us by those controversies (such as that of the *compositio continui*) wherein which side soever of the question you take, you will be unable *directly* and truly to answer the objections that may be urged to show that you contradict some primitive or some other acknowledged truth.

These, *Eugenius*, are some of the considerations by which I have been induced to distinguish the things that to me seem to overmatch our Reason, into three kinds. For of those things I have stil'd *Unconceivable*, our *Ideas* are but such as a moderate attention suffices to make the mind sensible that ~~she~~ wants either light or extent enough to have a clear and full comprehension of them : And those things that I have called *Inexplicable*, are those which we cannot perceive to depend

upon the *Ideas* we are furnished with, and to resemble in their manner of working any of the Agents whose nature we are acquainted with : And lastly , those things which I have named *Unsociable*, are such as have Notions belonging to them, or have conclusions deducible from them, that are (for ought we can discern) *either* incongruous to our primitive *Ideas* , or when they are driven home, inconsistent with the manifest Rules we are furnished with, to judge of True and False.

*Eug.* I presume, *Sophronius*, that by sorting things above Reason into three kinds, you do not intend to deny but that 'tis possible one object may in differing regards be referred to more than one of these sorts.

*Sophr.* You apprehend me very right, *Eugenius*, and the truth of what you say may sufficiently appear in that noblest of Objects , God.

*Timoth.* We owe so much to God, the most perfect of Beings,  
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not only for other blessings, but for those very Intellects that enable us to contemplate him, that I shall be very glad to learn any thing that may increase my wonder and veneration for an Object, to whom I can never pay enough of either.

*Sophr.* You speak like your self, *Timotheus*, and I wish I were as able as I ought to be willing, to satisfy your desire: But since we are now discoursing like Philosophers, not Divines, I shall proceed to speak of that gloriousst of Objects, But as his Nature or some of his Attributes afford me instances to the purpose, for which I presum'd to mention him. *When* God therefore made the World out of nothing, or (if *Pyrocles* will not admit the Creation) *when* he discerns the secretest thoughts and intentions of the Mind, *when* he unites an immaterial Spirit to a humane Body, and maintains, perhaps for very many years, that unparallel'd union with all the wonderful conditions he has annex'd to it; *when*, I say, he doth these

these and many other things, that I must not now stay to mention, he supplies us with instances of things that are *Inexplicable* : For such operations are not reducible to any of the ways of working known to us ; since our own Minds can but modify *themselves* by divers manners of thinking ; and as for things without us, all that one body can do to another by acting on it, is to communicate local motion to it, and thereby produce in it the natural consequences of such motion ; in all which there is no action like any of those I just now ascrib'd to God. And if we consider that the præscience of those future events that we call contingent, being a perfection, is not to be denyed to God ; who is by all acknowledged the perfectest of Beings, and that yet the greatest Wits that have laboured to reconcile this infallible præcognition with the liberty of mans will, have been reduced to maintain some thing or other, that thwarts some acknowledged truth

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or dictate of Reason: If we duly consider this ( I say ) it will afford us an instance of truths , whose consistency and whose symmetry with the body of other truths, our Reason cannot discern, and which therefore ought to be referred to that sort of things above Reason, that I call *Unsociable*. And now I come to the third sort of these things which is that I formerly mention'd, first under the name of *Incomprehensible* or *supra-intellectual* : which Title, whether or no it belongs to any other Object, (which I will not now enquire ) doth certainly belong to *God*, whose Nature comprehending all perfections in their utmost possible degrees, is not like to be comprehensible by our minds, who altogether want *divers* of those perfections, and have but moderate measures , (not to call them shadows) of *the rest*. We are indeed born with, or at least have a power and divers occasions to frame an *Idea* of a Being infinitely perfect, and by this *Idea* we may  
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sufficiently discriminate the Original of it, God, from all other Objects whatsoever. But then, when we come to consider attentively & minutely what is contained in the notion of Omnipotence, Omniscience, Eternity, and those other divine Attributes that are all united in that great confluence and abyſs of perfections, God; we may be ſure to find, that our faculties are exceedingly ſurmounded by the vaſtneſs and gloriousneſs of that *unlimited and unparallel'd* object; about which, *as* we can diſcover that it *exiſts*, and that it poſſeſſes *all the perfection* we can conceive, *ſo* we may at the ſame time diſcern, that it muſt have *degrees of perfection*, which becauſe of the inferiority of our Nature, we are not able to conceive.

And yet this diſcovery of Gods Incomprehenſibility may be made without ſubtle diſquiſitions, and without trains of conſequences, though not without due attention, by a direct view of the Mind (if I may

may so term it;) who finds her self upon tryal as unable fully to measure *the divine perfections* as the *dimensions of space*, which we can conceive to be greater and greater, without ever being able to determine any extent beyond whose limits they cannot reach.

*Pyrocles*, I suspected *Sophron*. by the tenour of your Discourse that the last Questions these Gentlemen asked you, diverted you from saying somewhat more than you did by way of application of your preceding Discourse.

*Sophron*. I was then indeed about to make, as I now shall, this use of what I had been saying; that I readily acknowledge that 'tis an arrogance to talk of infinite or of priviledg'd things, with the same confidence, or to pretend to do it with the same cleareness, wherewith knowing men may speak of things unquestionably within the compass of our Intellect: But that this need not hinder us from speaking, nor doth

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diffible us from speaking rational-  
 ly of priviledg'd things themselves.  
 For all the notions that are allow-  
 able are not of the same sort or  
 order ; and if none were to be ad-  
 mitted but those that enable us to  
 comprehend the Object, that is,  
 which give us a clear and distinct  
 knowledge of all that it contains  
 or that belongs to it, I must con-  
 fess that we have no good Notions  
 of priviledg'd things in particular:  
 but then I must add, that I fear  
 we have few or none even of ma-  
 ny things that we think our selves  
 very knowing in. And when we  
 speak of things as being *above Rea-*  
*son*, though we have no clear, di-  
 stinct and adequate Notion of  
 them, yet we may have a general  
 confus'd and inadequate Notion of  
 them, which may suffice to make  
 us discriminate their respective Ob-  
 jects from all else, and from one  
 another ; as may be observ'd in se-  
 veral *Ideas* that are negatively  
 fram'd, such as those we have of  
 invisible, incomprehensible, and  
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in others which I formerly call'd *Infer'd* ; because they accompany the remote Inferences whereby one truth is concluded from another : as when Geometricians infer from some propositions in *Euclid* that any strait line may be divided farther and farther without stop. For of this and some other propositions about priviledg'd things, we are not quite destitute of allowable Notions ; as may appear by some of the admirably ingenious Speculations of Mathematicians about the Affections of *Irr'd Numbers*, and about *incommensurable Magnitudes* ; about some of which we have no such clear and symmetrical Conceptions as we have of many other things, that are of a nearer and more intelligible order. And on this occasion I shall not scruple to acknowledge, that partly by my own Experience, and partly by the Confessions of others, and by their unsuccessful Attempts, I am induc'd to think that God, who is a most free Agent, having

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been pleas'd to make Intelligent Beings, may perhaps have made them of differing Ranks, or Orders, whereof Men may not be of the Principal; and that whether there be such Orders or no, he hath at least made us Men, of a limited nature (in general) and of a bounded Capacity. Congruously to this I think also, that he hath furnished man either with certain innate *Ideas* or Models and Principles, or with a Faculty or Power and Disposition easily to frame them, as it meets with occasions (which readily occur) to excite them: But because that (as I lately noted) God intended the mind of Man but of a limited Capacity, his Understanding is so constituted that the inbred or easily acquir'd *Ideas* and primitive Axioms wherewith it is furnished, and by Relation or Analogy whereunto it judges of all other Notions, and Propositions, do not extend to all knowable Objects whatsoever; but reach only to such as have a sufficient Affinity,  
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or bear some proportion to those Primary *Ideas* and Rules of Truth, which are sufficient if duly improv'd, to help us to the attainment, though not of the perfect knowledge of truth's of the highest Orders, yet to the Competent Knowledge of as much truth as God thought fit to allow our minds in their present (and perchance laps'd) Condition, or state of Union with their mortal Bodies.

*Eugen.* Your Opinion, *Sophon.* if I apprehend it aright, contains two very differing Assertions; one that it is allowable to contemplate and even to discourse of things above Reason, since we may have some Conceptions of them, though they be but very dim and imperfect: and the other, that we ought not to look upon, or speak of such Objects as things that we comprehend, or have even such a measure of knowledge of, as we have of things that are not priviledg'd. For of these we are not to speak but with a peculiar Wariness,

ness, and modest Diffidence.

*Sophron.* You have express'd my thoughts *Eugen.* since I Intend not to injoyn silence, or dissuade Curiosity, but yet forbid presumption, in reference to priviledg'd things.

*Timoth.* And truly *Sophron.* I see no Reason to repine at the limits which your late Discourse hath in imitation of the Author of nature himself, assign'd to human Knowledg. For the number of priviledg'd things is altogether inconsiderable in comparison of the multitude of other things, to which our knowledge may be improv'd to reach; and which it far more concerns us to know well, than it doth to resolve puzzling Questions about things incomprehensible; there being within the compass of those truths, enough to employ, and reward our Curiosity without straining and tiring our Reason about Objects that transcend it. And yet even about these, some disquisitions may be allow'd us, for an object



object that on the account of some of its properties may be a privileged one; may have divers other things belonging to it, that do not surpass our Reason, and whose knowledge may therefore be attain'd, by the due employment of it.

Thus we usefully study the nature of Bodies, which make up the Object of the Excellent Science of Natural Philosophy; though the true Notion of Body in general be a thing so difficult to frame, that the best of our Modern Philosophers can by no means agree about it. Which I do not wonder at; because if we pursue the notion of a Body to the uttermost; 'twill lead us to the perplexing controversy, *De compositione continui*, and there you will not deny, but that the understanding will be left in the dark. Thus Surveyors, Carpenters, Architects, and many others know divers *Affections* of the Square Figure that are of great use to them in their respective Employments,

though that *property* of the square, that *its side and diagonal are incommensurable*, be unknown to most of them; and if they were told of it, and would prosecute the Speculation, would involve them in exceeding great and probably insuperable difficulties.

*Sophon.* To confirm what you have been telling us, *Timoth.* I shall venture to add, that even about priviledg'd things, our inquiries, if modestly and discreetly manag'd, may not only be allowable but sometimes profitable. For even of such Subjects a studious search may bring us to know more than we did, though not so much as we would, nor enough to be acquiesc'd in. So that such enquiries may probably teach us, to know the Objects better, and our selves better too; by giving us such a sensible discovery of the insufficiency of our Understandings to comprehend all sorts of things, as may be very useful, though not pleasing, and may richly recompence

pence us, for the pains that ended in so instructive a disappointment. And let me add to the pertinent instances that have been mention'd, the noblest that can be given ; I mean the Contemplation of God himself. For he hath so ordered all things, that 'tis scarce possible for us, to be destitute of an *Idea* of him, which will at least represent him as an *existent Being*, and more *perfect* than any other Being ; and yet when we come with sufficient Application of mind to pry into the wonderful Attributes of this most singular and adorable Being, we are, as was lately observ'd, sure to find ourselves unable to comprehend so unbounded an Object. Which yet ought not to discourage us from so noble a Study, since we are allow'd the great contentment and honour to make further and further discoveries of the excellentest of Objects, by that very *immensity* of his perfections, that makes it impossible for us to reach to the bounds  
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of his Excellency, or rather to discover that it has any bounds at all.

But, Gentlemen, I perceive I have been so transported by the mention of this vast and divine Subject, in whose Contemplation 'tis so easie, and so pleasant to lose ones self, that I have forgot the notice *Eugen.* gave me, a pretty while since, that the time allotted for our present conference was then near expiring. And therefore I shall leave you to pick out of the Excursions to which your interpositions tempted (not to say oblig'd) me, the Applications, that I intended to make more methodically of the distinctions I laid down. And I am the less troubled to be hindred from proposing to you my thoughts about the way of distinguishing priviledg'd things from others, because we have a domestic Monitor, or a kind of an internal *Criterion* always at hand to help us. For I think it may well be said, that the wise Author of Nature has endued the Understanding



standing with such a quick, though internal, Sensation (if I may so call it) that when due attention is not wanting, it can feelingly discern between other Objects, and those that are disproportionate to its ability. As even in Beasts, the eye is so fram'd (according to the institution of Nature) that if it be obverted to the bright noon-day-Sun, there needs no Monitor, but the operation of the same Sun, to make it wink; (and perhaps water) and thereby discover it self to be dazled and overpowr'd by the disproportionate Object.

*Pyroc.* I confess your Discourses, Gentlemen, have made an unexpected Impression upon me; but whether that will amount to a Conviction will scarce appear till our next Conference. Only thus much I shall tell you now, that it would much facilitate our agreement in Opinion, if you did not contend for altogether so much; but would be pleas'd to leave it undetermin'd, whether Man's intellectual

*telleſtual Faculty it ſelf* is incapable by the help of any degree of light, to diſcover and know thoſe things, which you call above Reason? and would content your ſelves to ſay, That there are ſome things belonging to theſe Subjects, which we muſt confeſs we have leſs clear and diſtinct Notions of, than we have even of the difficulteſt of thoſe things, that are acknowledged not to ſurpaſs our Reason: And that if we will take upon us, to determine poſitively and particularly about theſe transcendent things, we muſt employ ways of Reasoning, congruous to their peculiar natures.

*Sophron.* I ſhall readily conſent not to expect your final Reſolution, before our next meeting, having no cauſe to fear that time, will be unfriendly to her Daughter Truth.

*Timoth.* And in the mean while, *Pyrocles,* I am glad to find by the laſt part of what you juſt now ſaid, that you ſeem to be no longer indispos'd to admit ſome things, that  
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(at least in our present state) do some way or other surpass our Reason. For I think that instead of *exalting* that faculty, we injure and *defraud* it, if we do not freely allow it, as much enjoyment of Truth as we are able to procure it: And consequently if Geometry, or Revelation, or Experience, assure us of divers things of which we can know but *That they are*, and *what they do*, not, *what they are*, and *how they act*, we must neither refuse, nor neglect the study of such Truths, any more than we would refuse to look into any other Objects, than those that we can *look through*; And therefore to enrich the Intellect as much as we are able, we must entertain, not only those Truths, that we can *comprehend*, but those also, how sublime soever, that we can have any *certain*, though but a very imperfect *Knowledge* of, Especially since those remote and abstruse Subjects may be as much more *noble* as more *dark* than others,

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